(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Turkey has extended any help to Government to fight terrorism; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes, Sir. During Prime Minister's visit to Turkey from 16-19 September, 2003, a Protocol between the Ministry of External Affairs of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey was signed for setting up of a Joint Working Group on Combating Terrorism.

(b) the Joint Working Group intends to share experience concerning terrorism, organized crime besides on illicit trafficking of humans, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as well as their linkages. This Group will work towards coordinating and extending cooperation on matters relating to ongoing global campaign against terrorism in the United Nations and other specialized institutions.

(c) and (d) The meeting of the first Joint Working Group is likely to take place in Ankara shortly, subject to mutual convenience.

Help of Russia, Tazakhstan and Syria in combating terrorism

†268. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have sought help of Russia, Tazakhstan and Syria in combating terrorism in the country;

(b) if so, the details of deliberations with the Prime Minister during his visit, recently;

(c) whether any agreement has been signed among the four countries; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and to what extent it would be helpful in combating terrorism?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (d)

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

Russian Federation

(i) India and the Russian Federation cooperate closely both bilaterally and in multilateral fora in fight against international terrorism. Their cooperation extends to close and regular consultations, exchange of information and sharing of experience in dealing with international terrorism and related phenomena including illicit drug and arms trafficking, organized crime, etc. Both countries have also condemned incidents of terrorism taking place in each other's territory. India and Russia have close identity of views on dealing with the threat posed by international terrorism and are keen to further enhance their cooperation in this regard. In the discussions Hon'ble Prime Minister held with the President of the Russian Federation during his visit to Russia from 11-13 November 2003, both sides reiterated their common stand on the need for the international community to fight terrorism everywhere and in every form, in a concerted and sustained manner. Both leaders expressed their satisfaction at the growing Indo-Russian cooperation in this regard and also expressed the hope that further development of interaction between concerned agencies of the two countries will bolstger the common endeavour of India and Russia to effectively fight international terrorism. In this context, satisfaction was also expressed at the outcome of the first meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Combating International Terrorism held in Moscow in end-September 2003. The JWG has been established under the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism signed during the visit of President Putin to India in December 2002. The two sides also appreciated the results of discussions in the Joint Working Group on Global Challenges, which held its first meeting in New Delhi in October 2003.

(ii) No.

(iii) Does not arise.

Tazakhstan

(i) India signed an agreement with Tazakhstan in January 2003 for setting up of a Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism.

(ii) During PM's visit to Tazakhstan on 13-14 November 2003, the issue of terrorism was also discussed. A Joint Declaration was signed by President of Tazakhstan and the Prime Minister of India which mentioned, *inter alia*, the following:

"The sides noted with satisfaction the formation of a Joint Working Group to combat international terrorism. They expect the Group's work will aid cooperation in combating organized crime, money laundering, illegal trafficking in weapons, ammunitions and explosives, international terrorism and other transnational threats. In this context, they reiterated that terrorism cannot be justified on any ground whatsoever. Terrorism is an attack on the human rights and civil liberties of the citizens of the world. It must be condemned unambiguously and eradicated wherever it exists. The sides also condemned the supporters of terrorism and those that finance, train or provide support for terrorists."

(iii) No, Sir.

(iv) The question does not arise.

Syria

(i) PM paid a State visit to Syria on November 14-16, 2003. The visit helped in establishing deeper understanding between the leaderships and renewed old historical links between the two countries. PM and President of Syria had comprehensive exchange of views on a wide range of important bilateral/regional and international issues, in a way that reflects the deep historical relations between India and Syria. While the issue of terrorism was discussed during the PM's visit to Syria, Syrian assistance was not specifically sought in combating terrorism in India.

(ii) No.

(iii) Does not arise.

Liberal visa rules between India and Russia

†269. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is any proposal under Government's consideration to make visa rules liberal with a view to facilitate the movement of industrialists and traders between India and Russia;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when a final decision in this regard is likely to be taken?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) to (c) India and the Russian Federation have been discussing ways and means to facilitate travel by businesspersons of each country to the other, as their regular interaction is an important factor in further enhancing bilateral trade and investment. Both the countries attack significance to easy issuance of business visas to entrepreneurs and traders who have interest in each other's country. Various ideas have been discussed. In the second round of Consular Consultations held in Moscow in October 2003, it was agreed that an Indo-Russian Working Group will meet in India in January 2004 to further discuss this issue, among others.

India's help to defuse Sri Lankan Crisis

270. DR. ABRAR AHMED: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Governmet have offered recently any sort of help to Sri Lanka Government to defuse the crisis in that country; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) and (b) Government of India expressed concern over the recent political developments and issued a statement on November 4, 2003 as follows: "We are surprised at the sudden political developments in Sri Lanka today. We hope that the situation does not provoke a constitutional crisis, which would

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.